Title: A crack in the shell : reading a few lines from *King Lear*

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Citation style: Sławek Tadeusz. (2016). A crack in the shell : reading a few lines from *King Lear*. "Anglica. An International Journal of English Studies" Nr 25/3 (2016), s. 11-36

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A Crack in the Shell: Reading a Few Lines from *King Lear*

Abstract

The article takes up the theme of Agamben's violence without a form of justice and reads Shakespeare's tragedy as spanned between Cordelia's "nothing" at the start of the play and Lear's "never" at its end. It also approaches a question of the relationship between, in Rousseau's word, "l'homme naturel" and "citoyen." Lear's push towards a position of being "unaccommodated" suggests a move away from the organization of life previously holding its rule over men towards a marginal, peripheral zone with uncertain rules where man has to risk his own decisions rather than merely follow the custom.

1. "Shut up your doors my Lord, 'tis a wild night" (2.2)

Before we hear these words thunders reverberate in a gray distance. *Storm and Tempest*: Shakespeare's indication punctuates a long speech in which the old king looks upon the course his life has recently taken not only as a personal demise (what he refers to as the "filial ingratitude," 3.4), but also as a collapse of a certain paradigm within which human life makes sense. Underneath personal disaster a more serious calamity is brewing, and we constantly have to read Shakespeare's tragedy on these two platforms. Dramatic, but minor, breakdowns within the family bespeak major cracks upon the structure of the general order. Kent discovers this truth. Having listed transgressions again the old king, he sees them as indicators of an apocalyptic crisis:, "[…] or something deeper, / Whereof (perchance) these are but furnishings" (3.1). Thus, we receive a hermeneutic instruction: to understand the course of events, we have to pay attention to details and what seems insignificant on a larger scale. Like shut doors and storminess of a night. This is a golden rule of manoeuvring in a gray space. "This attention to the genuinely insignificant – that which signifies despite all signs to the contrary, that is, in spite of itself, too – […] constitutes the one rule of thumb that can be counted on when operating in areas termed gray" (Fiorestos 125).

2. "Shut up your doors […]" (2.2)

The insistent accent upon barricading oneself against possible incursions from the outside is a constant note in the drama. The politics of Regan and Goneril aim at separating their territories from external pressures and gradual elimination of what they consider residues of the old order embodied by their father. What the two daughters construct is a system of immunological resistance against foreign viruses and those elements of the organism which potentially may jeopardize the homeostasis of the body politic. Goneril's conflict with the father hinges on the threat which the supposedly unruly behaviour of Lear's entourage poses to, as she puts it, "wholesome weal" (1.4). Hence, the necessity of suspending recently (as Lear notices, it all has happened "within a fortnight," 1.4) endorsed contracts and the decision to implement a special law, a law of exception. She calls for "instant remedy" (1.4) which under different circumstances would be shameful and disrespectful. Her declaration comes as the effect of "necessity": "which else were shame, that then necessity / Will call discreet proceeding" (1.4). We have then two processes which shape the course of events: (1) immunization of a territory, and (2) exceptionalization of law under the impact of "necessity." What is interesting, however, is that the immunization is directed, for the time being, against one's own citizens. No foreign army threatens Regan and Goneril yet; it is their own people that raise fears and make them bar the gates to their fortresses. Characteristically, this is what Machiavelli advices princes to do: "a prince who fears his own people more than foreigners ought to build fortresses, but he who has greater fear of foreigners than of his own people ought to do without them" (118). Fear of one's own people and a constant risk of misrecognition of their intentions are important subject matters of *Lear*.

3. "[…] yet our power / Shall do a courtesy to our wrath […]" (3.7)

Closing borders, barricading doors, sealing off of one's domestic territory is well ministered to by these two processes. Both of them serve the ideal of homogeneity which defines and protects domestic political interests by demonstrating their superiority over everything foreign. The universalization of the domestic is the name of the game. Roberto Esposito tells us that "the very essence of immunization at its most violent [is] border closings that do not tolerate anything from the outside, that exclude the very idea of an outside, that do not admit any foreignness that might threaten the logic of One-and-everything [*l'Uno-tutto*]" (63). Closing down borders is, in fact, closing down of a community which now is substituted by a system of terror the gravitational force of which is related to property and power. What was *common* now is replaced by what is ascribed to particular individuals. Lear himself follows the same logic which leads eventually to parcelling

out areas of the *common* territory and giving them proper names and borders. "Against the boundlessness of the community, which is *absoluta* and *exlege*, the individual and the state are born under the sign of separation and autonomy with regard to what is internal to their own proper borders" (Esposito 128).

This prepares the ground for anger as a means of defending one's interests by exercising a law which goes beyond the juridical restriction of the legal system itself. Cornwall's dictum "Thou well we may not pass upon his life / Without the form of justice, yet our power / Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men / May blame, but not control" (3.7) is dense with references to the situation of an *état de sičge*. It recognizes law as the main organizing principle of action in a society which always needs and cannot survive without a "form of justice." Yet, at the same time, it gives way to an emotional, affective response ("wrath") which law, under normal circumstances blind and insensitive, always tries to control and moderate. And, finally, it both acknowledges and shuns the sovereignty of the people who may critically evaluate a controversial action of the state but will have to remain inactive. This divorce between the "men" and the "sovereign" is particularly painful, as it drives a wedge between law and morality, politics and moral imagination. Even more seriously, what Cornwall declares is a gap between executive power and legislative power: we may act, even though we know our action to be unlawful because the action, due to the necessity, will bear the force of the law. Executive power is thus radically liberated; it can be judged ("blame") and yet such judgment will remain an empty gesture ("not control"). Law seems able to subsist only by capturing anomie, just as language can subsist only by grasping the nonlingustic. In both cases, the conflict seems to concern an empty space: on the one hand, anomie, juridical vacuum, and, on the other, pure being, devoid of any determination or real predicate" (Agamben 60). As a result, we obtain violence without a "form of justice." The empty space between life and law will turn out to be Gloucester's empty eye-socket.

4. "If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that stern time […]" (3.7)

The *gate* comes back, and evidently it is locked, bolted up against not only any kind of foreignnessbut also against the time which is *stern*. This qualification refers certainly to the storm which first approaches from a distance and then rages across moors. But the time is *stern* not only because of a brutal wind and severe rain; it is *stern* because it rises and speaks against human actions which time finds un-timely. One of the etymological paths of *stern* takes us to the Gothic *andstaurran* meaning "to murmur against," and the other brings us to the vicinity of Swedish *stursk* referring to something "refractory." Gates of the community are closed and barred which signals a dissolution of the (always open) community supplanted by the (always favouring borders) immunity. Gates bolted

up, being a figure of what in a modern state becomes "an enormous apparatus of immunization," indicate that "the concept of *immunitas* has to be contrasted directly with that of *communitas*" (Esposito 127). Everything that takes place in *King Lear* confirms this diagnosis. Gloucester, whose eyes have been torn out, must be relegated outside the city walls as a viral body of (as Regan puts it) "a filthy traitor" (3.7), one who flirts with and invites insanity into the rational order of the city (according to Regan, Gloucester supports "the lunatic King," 3.7), and hence his place is on a far and despised margin of the orderly world. "Turn out this eyeless villain" (3.7), commands Cornwall. But Lear himself has not behaved differently when he disinherited Cordelia for not complying with the rules of his contest. By disclaiming his paternal care, he sentences Cordelia to being a stranger in her own native realm, and therefore automatically she must become, like Kent, the object of all kinds of immunizing actions. Her foreignness is radical: from now on she will be more barbarian than barbarians themselves. "Here I disclaim all my paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood, / And as a stranger to my heart and me, / Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian, / Or he that makes his generation messes / To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom / be as well neighbour'd, and reliev'd, / As though my sometime daughter" (1.1). The doors are shut, and the nature of politics in *Lear* is to make them remain so.

5. "Allow not Nature, more than Nature needs" (2.2)

In fine, such a sense was made possible by the widening of a gap separating a life of the animal from that of a human being. These two kinds of life were *not* identical because the economy of the former was premised on the idea of strict, sturdy, *natural* measure, whereas the order of the latter sprang from excess and superfluity. As Lear puts it: "Allow not Nature, more than Nature needs: / Man's life is cheap as beast's" (2.2). There seem to be two "natures" then: one which is *natural*, no more than an answer to what Nature needs, a *natural* allowance granted life so that it could go on living. But nothing else and nothing more. The other "nature" is *natural* only to the degree to which it knows that it cannot remain within the confines of the "natural." It is "more than Nature needs," and the undefined *more* goes beyond "Nature" although this move itself is somehow *natural*. In the human being "Nature" both fulfils and defies itself. Fulfils – because human life, like any other, wants to live itself as long as possible; defies – because it can do so only when it crosses a certain point, an indelible but invisible line which separates the territory of *nothing more* from the realm of *more than...*. All human culture, Lear's claim is no less than this, defines itself as an elaborate system of transcending the limitations of Nature. Culture is *more than...* The point is not only to protect oneself so as to sur-vive, but to single oneself out,

embellish oneself so that mere sur-viving would be translated into a complicated system of signs determining roles and positions one takes in a society. Sur-viving is principally democratic; culture is hierarchical and aristocratic. Hence Lear's ironic but profound comment upon Regan's elegant dress: "If only to go warm were gorgeous, / Why Nature needs not what thou gorgeous wears't, / Which scarcely keeps thee warm, but for true need […]" (2.2). Culture offers refuge against the wildness of the night. It does not mean culture precludes wildness; it means wildness in it is a part of *more than...* Thus, concealed behind pretences and masks, it is more dangerous and deadly. A gray zone of culture. The doors are shut, but wildness is not; it already rages indoors.

6. "Why need one?" (2.2)

More than... of a culture is predicated upon a double game of prestige and thriftiness. Both daughters operate on the principle of enhancing their power, of having *more* (politically, economically, and as Edmund's physical attractiveness demonstrates, also erotically). This, however, implies the necessity of imposing limits elsewhere. The growth of one's own prestige is conditioned by the decrease of somebody else's social standing. One's own financial prosperity necessitates cuts in everybody else's. Hence Goneril's questioning considering the number of her father's entourage ("What need you five and twenty? Ten? Or five?" 2.2), which Regan summarizes in her curt calculation: "Why need one?" Everything depends upon the understanding of *need*. Another gray zone between sur-viving and living, scarcity and superfluity. All human history in its social and political implications is negotiating this murky, stormy, and gray territory of fuzzy contours of *need*.

7. "You think I'll weep, / No, I'll not weep. I have full cause of weeping" (2.2)

Lear's refusal to weep amazes us. It seems that for someone like the old king, broken by the "filial ingratitude," tears would be a natural relief. Certainly, there is a pressure of "the plague of custom" which prevents men from shedding tears. "Yet have the grace to consider that tears do not become man," as Celia puts it bluntly in *As You Like It* (3.4). But, at the same time, Lear does not perceive the whole crisis exclusively terms of the parent-child relationship; he experiences it as a breaking-up of the whole system of legitimate authority which he has officially ceded to his daughters. He has locked himself in a situation of disempowered authority that still wants to exercise the power which it has already delegated to somebody else. Goneril scores the point when she describes her father as "the idle old man / That still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away" (1.3). Lear is not like Richard II whose crown is being taken away from

him by force and hence the loss of the crown is a source of gray sadness of tears (Bataille: "There is something gray in tears […]") (Fioretos 42):

> Now is this golden crown like a deep well
> That owes two buckets, filling one another,
> The emptier ever dancing in the air,
> The other down, unseen and full of water:
> That bucket down and full of tears am I,
> Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high. (*Richard II*, 4.1)

8. "[…]but I am bound / Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears / Do scald, like molten lead" (4.7)

When Lear begins to weep, it is too late. As he puts it himself, he is already in the grave ("You do me wrong to take me out out o' th' grave," 4.7), and the tears accompany this strange resurrection of a man who has been brutally punished for not having recognized the falsity of signals which put a course of events on a wrong track. Lear has misread pronouncements of Regan and Goneril which lack of insightfulness has soon imposed upon history a dark and sombre sublimity of a devastating civil war and banishment. Lear, like a latter day Ixion, is fixed to a winged burning wheel ("bound / Upon a wheel of fire"), and we should not ignore this mute mythological reference. First, because it connects with one of the most important themes of *Lear* – that of hospitality and readiness to welcome what comes to us uninvited and unexpected. Not being able to deal with this issue at length here, let us only quickly suggest a reading of Shakespeare's tragedy as a sinuous story (similar to that of the mythological Ixion, a master violator of the host-guest relation) of the betrayal of the principle of unconditioned hospitality. The old king does not hospitably receive Cordelia's "nothing" and, in consequence, excludes his own daughter from his household ("I disclaim all my paternal care," 1.1). A strange blindness and deafness which can be so powerful as to break the most intimate connection of familial lineage. Very soon Regan and Goneril will repeal the law of hospitality towards their father, and the most striking violation of this law will come from the hands of Regan and Cornwall who cruelly blind Gloucester whose welcome they have just embraced. Gloucester's despaired "You are my guests: do me no foul play, friends" (3.7) marks a complete dismantling of hospitality as a ruling principle of sociability.

Second, the element of monstrosity connects Lear and Ixion. When the raging king puts forth his anthropology which sees man as possessed by lust and self-interest, he makes reference to centaurs. "Down from the waist they are Centaurs, though women all above" (4.6). And we have to remember that it is the uncontrollable lust of Ixion that gave birth to the race of Ixionidae, otherwise

known as centaurs, a lineage which can be traced back to Ixion's sexual act with a false-Hera conceived for him by the jealous Zeus (marginally we can notice that in Barthes the satyr says "I want my desire to be satisfied immediately. If I see a sleeping face, parted lips, an open hand, I want to be able to hurl myself upon them" (Barthes 155). We should never lose from our view this apparitional presence of the monstrous, of the uncanny, indelibly making its marks within us, which haunts *Lear*.

Third, in the Greek myth Ixion is bound, on Zeus's order, to a fiery wheel by Hermes, not only a messenger god but also the patron of hermeneutics. Ixion is punished for not having understood the ineradicable divine script of hospitality and so is Lear, strikingly blind both to the verbose but deceitful messages of the two elder daughters and to the truthful but monosyllabic proclamation of Cordelia. In the early scenes of the play Lear does not weep because it seems to him that he *sees* things clearly. He does not. He regains his sight only when tears begin to blur and veil his eyes. They are like "molten lead" because (1) they burn out the scales which prevented him from seeing and (2) they "scald" him, that is break the protective, immunitarian shell of self-righteousness opening his body to all kinds of wounds. Only now is he able to see that he is "cut to the brain" (3.6). Which means that only now, on condition of his eyes being veiled by tears, can he interrupt a circle of illusions. "Tears and not sight are the essence of the eye" and hence "deep down, deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep" (Derrida 126). Lear's tears resemble clouds, gray like ashes, which densely cover the sky above the moors but thus help Lear to begin to see his predicament which he was unable to see in the daytime sunshine.

9. "[…] I want this glib and oily art, / To speak and purpose not" (1.1)

Tears are paradoxical blockages which allow the, so far immobile, rays of eyesight to move. They also activate *seeing* as *understanding*. Only when blinded by tears, those liquid pearls, is the old king able to understand a true sense of everything which has been so ostentatiously proclaimed at the very beginning: now he *sees* the emptiness of rhetorical flamboyance and the fullness of Cordelia's *nothing*. From *some-thing* to *no-thing* is a movement of understanding. Thus weeping is also a critique of language and its dangerously overinflated claims. Seeing as understanding meet in the gray zone where language falters and begins to stammer and wane in a distance. "The most precious tears […], fluid discharges more valuable than amber yet weighing less than air, are those that prevent a person from speaking – are tokens of lament only to the extent that they render language impossible without therefore replacing it […]. In gray areas […] language seems to exist only during the period when it appears between the tear's delay […] and arrival" (Fioretos 46–47). From the "oily art" of speaking, to the unnamed *rest*

which always belongs to silence is the course we cover in *Lear*. In the gray zone in which the king finds himself together with Edgar, Kent, and Gloucester, the social roles and words which name them do not vanish but undergo a radical deconstruction. We witness a ruthless mechanism of grayness which withers from inside the colours of the social structure. Hence, Lear can insist on the unquestionable character of his royal dignity ("I am the King himself," what is more – "every inch a King," 3.6) and yet, when he ultimately *sees* (that is when he pierces the cocoon of his own misconceptions), he, weeping, de-constructs his model of the world. The spatial metaphor of the theatre remains but the aesthetic contents which fill this structure changes from tragedy to tragi-comedy, this peculiar and striking mixture of tears and laughter. "When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" (4.6), tears mark a tragedy but this tragedy is performed by a group of "fools." The canonical high form of monarchs, tragedy, is supplanted by a low form of the mob – comedy. One of Goneril's last interventions when she sees her plot disintegrate and hopes thwarted is a brief statement: "An interlude" (5.3). Nothing could be more adequate to express this fold of history which is always present underneath its smooth surface. Tragi-comic may well be an aesthetic term which names what on the ground of philosophy was called "Fortune." Kings replaced by fools, or – to be more specific – kings *as* fools, fools as the unnamed *rest* of kings which must be revealed if the king is to defend his humanity rather his function. This also spells the end of rhetorical brilliance as a mark of the political power and its efficiency. Now, a weeping Lear, also withdraws from the articulate language. His famous invective against man dwindles into the gray delta of helpless exclamations: "There's hell, there's darkness, there's sulphurous pit; burning, scalding, stench, consumption: "fie, fie; pah, pah […]" (4.6)."Fie, fie; pah, pah […]" inarticulate, ejaculative, stuttering of someone who, like Lear, notices that although his social role imposed upon him a discourse of the plural "we," he does not know who are the "we" in whose name he was making his proclamations. "The stuttering itself betrays the form of the problem: we, 'we,' how are we to say 'we'" (Nancy 70).

The fool, so frequently invoked in *Lear* and other Shakespeare's plays, is a king of tears and laughter; he is the one who can subvert the structure of the imposed order and welcome the gray unknown which the orderly world does everything to prevent us from doing. Perhaps we should pay more attention to the Athenian craftsmen who in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* change tragedy into tragi-comedy and thus disclose the erratic and illusory nature of the monarchical power which can force its decisions upon us only as long as (is it not also a lesson of *The Tempest*?) it exercises control over the elaborate and sophisticated invisible means of evoking terror and obedience. What is at stake is again the issue of the "shut gates," of the exaggerated immunizing system, which tears weaken and undermine thus making it possible for us to encounter what comes from the outside. "I do not think it would be difficult to demonstrate that both tears and

laughter are connected with the invasion of the unknown, with the suppression of the part of the world we consider as known […]" (Fioretos 42).

10. "He calls to horse, but I will not know whither" (2.2)

The old king sets out with his riders, but we have to notice that now, once he has been locked in the gray space, he is no more than a king-errant. The region of storm and hail does not recognize human political powers and makes the orderliness of the political world ridiculously empty. Lear commands, but his orders are dis-orderly, his directions mis-directed, and his timing is wrong. He orders his companions ("a desperate train" Regan will call them) to move, but it is a wild ride without a destination. He is on the verge of carrying out acts he cannot name or envisage ("I will do such things, / What they are yet, I know not"). The circumstances of the expedition are far from auspicious – "the night comes on, and the high winds / Do sorely ruffle, for many miles about / There's scarce a bush." Travelling under gray skies is not easy; "we linger and loiter, drift on or about, getting absolutely nowhere. As we watch the ashes of our faltering existence grayen, we try to make amends by choosing some *mots justes* to sum it all up, but sooner rather than later we feel racked, throw up our hands and indulge again the simplest of desires known to us: that to disappear" (Fioretos 115). Lear wants to vanish, dissolve in the storm, in what he calls "winds, cataracts, hurricanoe spout, sulphurous and thought-executing fires" (3.2). Politics of grayness must end up in madness of a storm which rages not only outside but, first of all, inside man's soul – "The tempest in my mind, / Doth from my senses take all feeling else" (3.4). Lear appears on stage proclaiming his "darker purpose," but now, when is himself is a subject in the domain of the gray zone, he has to move within the range of *gray* purposes, purposes unclear, unknown, chaotic, which are no purposes at all. And since a society cannot be managed without a set of purposes, objectives, and rules, then Lear is stripped of company. His knights disperse, his mind begins to veer from the course of sanity. When we see him next, he is alone accompanied only by Fool. "But who's with him?" asks Kent, to which in the gray zone there is only possible answer – "None but the fool" (3.1).

11. "Meantime we shall express our darker purpose" (1.1)

These are words with which Lear makes his appearance on stage. These are also words which delineate a certain physics and hermeneutics of royalty. Physics, because they evidently, through the very choice of rhetoric (the royal "we") suggest a "heaviness" of the kingly spirit which has always to deal with and speak in the plural. In its own name but also in the name of the body politic. The weight of

the plural, nominated in such words as *cares*, *business*, and ultimately *burden*, dictates its laws in the world of politics. *Darker purpose* ushers in a different question, that of the principally unclear character of the political realm. It is true that the monarch is to publicly announce his decision but, at the same time, the royal pronouncement presents itself as something which, so far hidden and invisible, is come to the open, and yet does not completely shake off the cloak of ambiguity. The *purpose* is to be proclaimed, but it is still a *darker* purpose which, in turn, invites a suspicion that the political is a domain of goals and tactics which, even when disclosed, keep in themselves a sealed, *darker* chamber. Never THE *purpose*, one and totally and lawfully revealed, but always a possibility of a sequence of aims, each of which may carry in itself its *darker* twin brother. Thus the political would call for a hermeneutics able to deal with these sequences allowing, at least, temporarily, to define and map positions of a given purpose as, provisionally, deprived of its curtain of *darker* purposes.

Shakespeare provides us with a plebeian version of such hermeneutics in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where Bottom, newly brought back to his human form, tries to come to terms with his previous adventures. Their meaning will remain for ever veiled and unapproachable, although approached it must be. "Methought I was – there is no man can tell what […]. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen; man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom […]" (4.1). There is no *bottom*, no ultimate sense which blocks all further movements because there is no *Bottom*, there is no one who can, after all the sinuous transformations, fully answer to this name. All there exists is a metamorphic current which rapidly carries us where it wants.

12. "Give me the map there" (1.1)

Decades ago Marshall McLuhan considered this command pivotal as a signature of a new era which "provided a model of the process of quantification and fragmentation as it entered the world pf politics and family life" (159). The map facilitates ways of commanding reality by translating huge territories and expanses into a manageable and serviceable chunks of pictorial spaces. To divide a kingdom while yielding a map is easy. And yet *King Lear* is a play on how deceptive this process of the translation of the unmanageable into manageable is. Everything that follows demonstrates that the neat outlines of the map do not correspond to the fuzziness of a geographic, political, and moral reality. The map and a quick movement of the king's hand portioning out areas, giving them names, rules and thus new political dimensions, radically differ from the consequences of such a manual gesture in the material world. McLuhan is right: "Shakespeare's entire

work is taken up with the themes of the new delimitations of power, both kingly and private" (160), and hence the monarch's order is to be read as an attempt to face the challenge of such delimitations. One needs to supplant McLuhan's perceptive observation with one more crucial element in play: everything that will take place on the map, the movement of the king's pencil demarcating new borders and its dramatic consequences, will depend on language. To be more precise: on a discourse and the ability to determine conditions in which a discourse makes sense. Thus, it needs to be coupled with the last two words of Lear's monologue: *speak first.* Before we proceed, let us remember Bottom's warning: *Methought I was – there is no man can tell what*. Its echoes resound in Lear's interrogation "who is it that can tell me who I am?" (1.4). It is only when the self begins to see itself as problematic losing its former self-assurance that a path towards a community is possible. "The Other is thinkable, and must be thought, beginning from that moment when the self appears and appears to itself as a 'self'" (Nancy 77).

13. "We have divided / In three our Kingdom" (1.1)

The act of dividing is of singular importance. It refers not only to a demarcation of new, separate administrative units; it stems from a certain vision of human community and indicates a certain line of political thinking. Lear means his decision to lead to what Kant called later the "eternal peace." The king steps down so "that future strife / May be prevented now" (1.1). Hence a question: can peace be secured and successfully preserved by the act of division? Does not peace belong the realm of unity? Is it not a way of dressing the wound of division? A hundred years after Shakespeare, Anthony Shaftesbury will speak of the merits and drawbacks of what he calls "cantonizing," on the one hand, a "natural" activity when the state is too vast, too imposing, and therefore "unnatural," on the other hand however, an operation which may threaten what he calls "the associating genius of man" by dispersing people and directing them towards their own interests, which he considers the very opposite of "sociableness" (76).

And divisions do proliferate in *Lear*. First, the old king divides the kingdom, then estranges Cordelia from himself and her two sisters; very soon Regan and Goneril will turn against Lear and then begin to secretly scheme against each other. Finally a war will descend upon the already divided and antagonistic territories. Albany's speech grasps well the intricate knot of conflicts: "Where I could not be honest / I never yet was valiant, for this business / It touches us, as France invades our land, / Not bolds the King, with others whom I fear, / Most just and heavy causes make oppose" (5.1). If there is a way of thinking peace in political terms as the most precious gift of human fellowship, it must see it as a gradation of conflicts. Anthony Shaftesbury touched upon this problem in his *Characteristics*: "'Tis strange to imagine that war, which of all things appear the most savage,

should be the passion of the most heroic spirits. But 'tis in war that the knot of fellowship is closest drawn" (75). Albany recognizes the rightness of Lear's cause, he admits the old king has a moral right to "oppose" and contest the ruling power, and yet he suspends this right on behalf of what he considers a more serious and immediate challenge – a foreign invasion. A thin and vague prospect of peace depends upon the proper arrangement of a sequence of feuds and contentions. The ending of the play suggests yet another path: peace is practicable as a time of mourning after the excesses of history after which, as Albany says, "our present business / Is general woe" (5.3). More metaphorically, Edgar will describe peace as "the weight of this sad time" (5.3) thus connecting peace with a rich and sombre realm of melancholia. Peace is a melancholy of history, a time when a Realpolitik of self-interest gives way to a politics of sentiment and sensitiveness. A time, Edgar confides, when we "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3).

14. "[…] With reservation of an hundred knights […]" (1.1)

Niccolò Machiavelli indirectly speaks against the map when he accentuates the necessity to actually know a given territory, since a map constitutes an unreal, illusory habitat which differs considerably from a physical landscape. He warns in the 14th chapter of *The Prince*: "he [the prince – T.S.] must continually engage in hunting, and thus accustom his body to hardships; and meanwhile learn the nature of the land, how steep the mountains are, how the valleys debouch, where the plains lie, and understand the nature of rivers and swamps" (90). In her reproach of her father's train of knights Goneril speaks as a keen reader of Machiavelli's treatise: she perceives Lear's armed group as being on a constant alert, practicing their military skills and thus, always ready to act, as an independent force of mercenaries, against the decrees of the state: "Tis politic, and safe to let him keep / At point a hundred knights: yes, that on every dream, / Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike / He may enguard his dotage with their powers, / And hold our lives in mercy" (1.4).

15. "To shake all cares and business from our age, / Conferring them on younger strengths, while we / Unburthen'd crawl toward death" (1.1)

The strategy looks simple: divide the empire, get rid of the stress of reigning, and thus live freely. This amplifies a general thesis of the burdensome character of political power which calls for much energy and strength and therefore must, at some point, be recognized as being *beyond* the ruler's abilities. There must come a point past which power is nothing but a burden, a weight no longer bearable, and the task of the prince is to be able to mark up such a point, so as not to go

beyond it. But abandoning power is more complicated; it is a decision from the inside deconstructed by its own opposition, a decision ultimately un-decisive. Lear himself provides us with two arguments on behalf of this thesis. First, if what remains after the time of power is *crawl toward death*, then reigning is the epitome of life. To live is to strive for power, practice power and maintain it. To exercise power is a synonym of living. The very idea of giving up political authority has then a very different lining: a prince has to give it up in such a way so as to be able to live and thus to, somehow, remain in power. This may very well be a *darker purpose* of all politics.

The other argument follows shortly: Lear's opening speech which is to proclaim his stepping down begins and finishes with a command, which is a manifestation of force. Hence a question: since power belongs to the old, even if they seemingly want to abandon it, is it possible at all for the world to be ever ruled by young ones? And another one: is politics conceivable outside the rhetoric and logic of command and enforcing obedience?

16. "[…] while we / Unburthen'd crawl toward death" (1.1)

First of all, never *unburthen'd* since the stigma of power remains indelible. Goneril sees it clearly that political power somehow "grows into" the ruler's body, soaks into him or her, becomes indistinguishable from his/her substance. The burden of decision making cannot be simply put aside. "[…] idle old man / That still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away […]" (1.3). The old man is called *idle* which predicates his being useless and vain but, at the same time, it suggests – through the Greek etymology taking us back to *itharos* meaning "clear as in spring" – that Goneril discovers the truth about man in general. When transparent and thus open to the insightful investigative look, man reveals himself/herself for what he/she truly is: a being of power because power constitutes a mark which cannot be washed away and removed. Power is an irremovable, deep-seated tattoo over the existential structure of man. The body is always politic and therefore it is always a tattooed body; flesh covered with more or less decipherable marks (see *Coriolanus*) of honour and authority. Thus, we "crawl toward death" – this part of Lear's proclamation is true; but never *unburthen'd*. This grace has been withdrawn from us, mortals.

17. "[…] while we […] crawl toward death" (1.1)

We may set Lear's opening speech next to Prospero's concluding lines. The magus of the enchanted island, having claimed back his dukedom, wants to retire. Back in Naples he hopes "to see the nuptial / Of these our dear-belov'd solemnized" (5.1)

and then "retire me to my Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave." In both dramas the same positioning of parties: the old versus the young, a spring of marriage versus a winter of cold senility, nuptials versus mournful obsequies, retirement of old rulers versus the enthronement of new ones. Prospero and Lear both *crawl toward death* and neither of them is truly *unburthen'd*. The former got rid of his books of wisdom and became helpless, besides he will never be able to forget the naivete of the young. Miranda's memorable and fatuous outcry of admiration "O, wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world / That hath such people in't!" (5.1) is a clear indication that the rule of the young in Naples will not be very successful. Lear has yet to learn this lesson, but his education in this respect will be thorough and painful. He ends up cursing humanity a "men of stone" (5.3) worthy of a plague. "A plague upon you murderers, traitors all" (5.3) is a harangue that belongs to the pages of Machiavelli's treatise in which the foundational belief of the political anthropology is a radically realistic estimate of not so much "human nature," as of the forms which we have created for humanity to act and live in: "[…] for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation" (92).

"Crawling toward death" remains the only territory in which the deadly distinction between "is done" and "ought to be done" does not hold. This is where we are who we are. The only difference between the old and the young seems to be that the latter consider it only as a distant hypothesis while the former have experienced that the very essence of "how we live" is how we "crawl toward death." This knowledge does not make the old any "better": it imposes upon their faces a peculiar grimace, a grin, or sends through their bodies a spasm of a strange laughter. As Prospero says "And my ending is despair" (5.1) Despair: the unbridgeable gap between the "is" and "ought" which also is a source of the tragi-comic.

18. "[…] while we […] crawl […]" (1.1)

The choice of the verb should not go unnoticed. It indicates that despair also implies a change in the way in which we position ourselves in the world: no longer *walking* but, instead, *crawling*. Certainly a redefinition of the place of man is in view. In fine, the verb marks a move away from humanity towards animality. If being human tended and worked upon a distance separating it from the animal and its dark, earthly domain of soil, now *crawl* jettisons us from this erect position. First, it slows the pace of our dealing with the world, the ever growing velocity of which we have always been proud of. Despite nascent criticism, like Goethe's concept of *Luziferisch* marrying rapidity of changes with the diabolical element,

what we have interpreted as "progress" was synonymous with the increasing ability to move faster and faster. A shift to *crawling* deals a heavy blow to these ambitions. As if Lear were saying: I know that my former frantic running along the course of life was, in fact, doomed to end up in crawling, was nothing but crawling temporarily suspended and disguised, and now it is time to recognize it for what it has always been. Politics is a clever and manifold succession of masks imposed upon a dull face of boredom.

And second, *crawling* inevitably puts us closer to the ground, face down, with legs and arms translated into animal paws, and the proud erect position all of a sudden crushed by a sight of the danger we have always known to be there and always indulged in a rich variety of evasive moves which were to make it possible for us to ignore this jeopardy. Now, we *crawl* like soldiers, no longer on parade but under a deadly fire, powerless in the trenches of fear and anxiety. Lear says and Prospero confirms: *we are animals, and we are exposed*. We are brought into the Open, no longer able to hide behind elaborate constructions of power (which, however, we can never abandon or destroy), and now we see that "the understanding of the human world is possible only through the experience of the closest proximity – even if deceptive – to this exposure without disconcealment" (Agamben 62).

19. "The tyranny of the open night" (3.3)

We have to begin by drawing a line beyond which we cannot go when thinking of the Open. This line determines the field of operation of such human categories as "friendliness," "magnanimity," or "benevolence." Indifferent to human concerns and predicaments, the Open demarcates a sphere where politics is stripped of its embellishments and is revealed for what it is – operations of brute force and violence. One has to notice right away that in *Lear* relations between politics and nature are complicated. Violent oppression refuses to be qualified simply as endemic to the confines of "Nature;" Realpolitik of power exceeds these confines. The tyranny in question is "too rough for Nature to endure." To understand this strange, cruel excess of power, we have to turn to Edmund's speech in which he chooses and evokes "Nature" as his patroness. "Thou Nature art my Goddess" (1.2), confesses Edmund, but his proclamation in fact reduces Nature to the scale of humanity and human organization of the world in which the concept of "Nature" has its own *un-natural,* because man-made, place. Edmund calls forth "Nature" only to struggle with what he understands as "the plague of custom." Himself a bastard, Edmund wishes to abolish the hierarchy in which "bastards" occupy a disadvantaged position. His rebellion is not on behalf of the non-human or a-human but super-human. His point of destination is not the unchartered Open but a well-mapped territory of human property. Edmund declares war not against

the human law which disfigures and frequently destroys the world and relations within it; his war aims at bending the law to his own advantage. To "grow" and "prosper" is his purpose and hence his declaration: "Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land" (1.2). Edmund uses "Nature" not to re-define the human order but to strengthen the sphere of human, all-too-human interests. Now we see why the tyranny of the Open (night) is "too rough" for "Nature:" it is so because "Nature" has already been incorporated by man in his mental order and thus has become yet another category of the human discourse organizing the world. To experience the Open must therefore imply going beyond the confines of these categories. Hence, the madness of the young Ophelia and the old Lear. Both of them gave up on the articulate language, both have traded it for plants, both *crawl* rather than *walk* (Ophelia ultimately will join fluvial creatures for which water is the native element). Cordelia: "[…] why, he was met even now / As mad as the vex'd sea, singing aloud, / Crwon'd with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds, / With bur-docks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers, / Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow / In our sustaining corn" (4.4).

20. "[…] the idle weeds that grow/ In our sustaining corn" (4.4)

The Open (night) which is always "too rough" does violence to our principal, foundational notions such as tender cultivation from which rises "our sustaining." Weeds are "idle," that is unproductive, if not counterproductive, in the whole scheme of man's idea of cultivation. To make one step further: they are, as both "weeds" and "idle," adversaries of *cultura*, the elaborate system which humanity finds defining and originary. Vico notes it carefully and repetitively in his extensive commentaries to the frontispiece of *The New Science*: "The plough rests its handle against the altar with a certain majesty, to give us to understand that ploughed lands were the first altars of the gentiles, and to denote also the natural superiority which the heroes believed they had over their *socii*" (10), and hence "cities were called *arae*, altars, throughout the ancient world of the gentiles" (11).

Lear, bedecked with weeds, is a figure which gives shelter to what has been marginalized and condemned as useless if not destructive. In this way he opposes Edmund whose logic aims at refashioning the order in such a way so that its canonical rules (such as the law of private property) would support the irregularly inflated ambitions. Weeds gather at Lear's body as if it were an "altar," in the same way as, Vico again," to these altars, the impious-nomadic weak, fleeing for their lives from the stronger, came seeking refuge, and the pious strong […] took the weak under their protection" (12). We read this scene looking for two senses: first is that of the idea of shelter which man must give to the unproductive and marginalized in order to face the Open; second, that the act of giving refuge takes place at the margins of the order, in the realm of disease and insanity (which

Cordelia in the same scene asks the physician to cure), and is itself a strange movement, an activity in itself unproductive and yet containing many possibilities.

This is a reading of the Open offered by Agamben's interpretation of Heidegger's notion of *Brachliegen* which means "to leave fallow, that is, inactive, uncultivated." But it is precisely this deactivation which is viewed as "potentiality for doing" (66). Cordelia sees the motivation for her military commitment enhanced by the strange irrational activity of the old, deranged Lear. Her decision is to struggle not because of "blown ambition" but for "love, dear love, and our ag'ed father's right" (4.4). This is what politics of the gray zone is based upon, and this is also why it is bound to lose. It must "lose" because thinking of and doing justice to the beloved, it knows that this justice can never include others who also deserve it. "There is something inside love – its enclosure in a world of duality – that essentially contradicts justice. Not because love is too pure, but rather […] because it is not pure enough to satisfy the general demand for the good that only justice can provide" (Esposito 123).

21. "The Gods are just" (5.3)

Justice is long overdue. It comes when nearly everything has been done in an unjust manner. Death has spread its shroud upon Cordelia, Lear, and Gloucester; the civil war has ravaged and "gor'd" the state. Human justice which tries to restore order at the end of the drama consists mainly in shedding blood: Edgar kills Edmund, Lear stabs the Captain who hanged Cordelia, Regan and Goneril successfully and fatally plot against each other. Justice seems to be no more than a system of equivalents holding over the dark area of crimes. And the divine justice is not different. The Gods are just, claims Edgar, only after they have previously set up a deadly trap for a human being. Justice is a follow up to injustice, it remedies what it has itself spoiled before. Gloucester's suffering is a long-overdue punishment for the sin of his youth. "The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices / Make instruments to plaque us: / The dark and vicious place where thee he got, / Cost him his eyes" (5.3). What gods do to earn the title of being *just* is to penalize man for the illegitimate use of the faculties they have themselves provided him with. Sacred justice is a virtue which serves interests of gods themselves rather than straightening ways of humanity. This is the heart of Gloucester's bitter comment: "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods, / They kill us for their sport" (4.1). Gods and men both share the unruly sphere of desire and passion (wantonness). Inside the human realm justice is then no more than a game of self-interests coordinated and managed by power. Goneril's impudent challenge "the Laws are mine not thine/ Who can arraign me for't?" (5.3) is a great example of this regularity. Divine justice ministered by gods to the human world is a game of pleasure the source of which is the painfully prolonged

time which lapses between a sin and its criminalization and a sinuously tortured sequence of events which make it impossible to see a connection between the fault and its corrective measure. As Gloucester says divine justice is no more than gods' sport. "This is also why justice is always the need for justice, that is, the objection to and protest against injustice, the call that cries for justice, the breath that exhausts itself in calling for it" (Nancy 189).

22. "I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs / To apply to his bleeding face" (3.7)

Perhaps we should correct ourselves: not *lose* but act in such a way that the standard logic of winning or losing traditionally dominating politics does not pertain to these actions. When Cornwall and Regan brutalize Gloucester (Cornwall: "Upon these eyes of thine, I'll set my foot," 3.7), servants are the only ones to react. The call of the rebellion is the same as Kent's plea to Lear: to withhold action so as to open a space for deliberation. Kent begins with the admonition that power has to safeguard itself against the linguistic zest ("When power to flattery bows?" 1.1), and then moves towards a criticism of hasty judgment which should end up in repealing previous decisions and reopen the process of deliberation: "reserve thy state, / And in thy best consideration check / This hideous rashness" (1.1). The servant's plea to Cornwall: "Hold your hand, my Lord" (3.7) belongs to the same order of attempts to struggle with the anomie resulting from constructing human society on the basis of property and propriety, those two foundations of the hierarchical order. Both Kent and the servant appeal to the superiors not on behalf of the well-established, structured social roles but on behalf of the loyalty of emotionally human, not social, response. This can be seen in servant's address: "I have serv'd you ever since I was a child: / But better service have I never done you, / Than now to bid you hold" (3.7). Regan, a politician speaking from within rigours of her craft, understands it not as a call for opening a space for a common deliberation, but in a way characteristic of political thinking, as a revolutionary gesture which wants to abolish the dominating order. Her "A peasant stand up thus?" coupled with a treacherous attack on the servant from behind is a clear reaction of a threatened guardian of the hierarchical social order. Two conclusions follow from this scene. First, there is a possibility of actions which would not be energized exclusively by the obtaining social order of anomie, action based upon the loyalties much more fundamental and profound than those generated by the theatre of social roles. Second, such actions sooner or later will bring about political commitment which will have to begin by unbolting the doors (Third Servant: "Let's follow the old Earl, and get the Bedlam / To lead him where he would […]," 3.7) and replace the politics of wounding with that which dresses and tries to heal wounds. Hence, "Go thou: I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs / To apply to his bleeding face" (3.7). Such politics moves beyond mere

success or failure, and its obligations do not derive from party loyalties. In his final words Edgar formulates succinctly the premise of such politics, which we may describe as "gray": "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3).

23. "Nothing, my Lord" (1.1)

What the servants do in the scene where Cornwall tears out Gloucester's eyes is precisely not *making from the shaft*, not running away from the sword raised to strike a deadly blow. This is also Kent's attitude – the old councillor is ready to allow the shaft to hit the target ("Let it fall rather, though the fork invade / The region of my heart," 1.1), and this middle position between the sword and its prey, the bow and the bull's eye, interests us here. It designates a space in which a different politics is conceivable; a Realpolitik in which the body is totally subjected to political ambitions and tactics momentarily makes room for the body liberated from such pressures, the body de-politicized. Realpolitik which is biopolitics, that is a politics in which the body matters only as a token in a ruthless game of power is for a brief moment illuminated by the light of a politics in which life matters for what it is, a sudden spark of a politics of *bios,* of politics as *bios*. Cordelia's famous *nothing*, puncturing the excessive accumulation of rhetorical and material goods produced by Goneril and Regan and accepted at its face value by Lear, is another flash of the short circuit of this type. What Cordelia does in her *nothing* is defend the nakedness of the thing and life against the "double pomp" of Realpolitik which always hides its naked interests behind masks and pretences. Cordelia's *nothing* demonstrates the wastefulness of politics by trying to reveal the fact that politics, always and inevitably a domain of *some-thing,* is human only to the degree to which it preserves and shelters its connection with the *no-thing* of existence in which each individual is grounded. Hence, we cannot but endorse Roberto Esposito's view that "if we fail to grasp this constitutive and imperative link between thing and nothing, which melancholy at once undergoes and safeguards, we risk being stuck with a reductive and simplified image of community" (29). We sense a similar warning against the obsessive accumulation of the *some-thing* and the way they impose false embellishment upon politics in Salisbury's speech in Shakespeare's *King John*:

> Therefore, to be possess'd with double pomp,
> To guard a title that was rich before,
> To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
> To throw a perfume on the violet,
> To smooth the ice, or add another hue
> Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
> To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
> Is wasteful and ridiculous excess. (4.1)

24. "[…] Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds / Reverb no hollowness" (1.1)

Kent is trying to bare Lear's folly ("when Lear is mad […]," 1.1) which seems to consist in the excessive faith in words. A danger innate to language, a threat which hovers in every utterance, is that a sophisticated construction of many sentences and rhetorical tropes is never loved in. The hollowness in question is an echo which resounds in empty, though elaborately ornamented, spaces. Hence to the contortions of Goneril and Regan's syntax Cordelia opposes not a sentence but only one word. Her *nothing* is a solitary, maverick gunslinger on a mission to reveal the abuses and dark machinations of power manifest in discourse. Nothing illustrates these cunning stratagems better that Goneril's florid speech which seemingly shows inadequacy of language to express love ("Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter," 1.1), while, in fact, it glorifies speech as a way to obtain one's will. Cordelia's *nothing* cuts an opening in the ornate, but hollow, shell of discourse, pointing at an exit from the subterfuge. Such cutting, a bad wound dealt to the fluency and verbosity of discourse cannot be carried out by a sentence which is always suspected of hiding traps of power. Hence, only one word, which being *nothing,* in a sense eliminates itself leaving us with *no-thing*, with empty hands of love against those who are empty-hearted in their claims to power and possessions. And we have to remember that the theme of the rhetorical exercises set by Lear is love, and their point is how to say I-love-you. From this perspective, *King Lear* reinforces the strength of Roland Barthes' argument which emphasizes the active character of such an amorous declaration whose force is directed against language. "Just as *amen* is at the limit of language, without collusion with its system, […] so the proffering of love (*I-love-you*) stands at the limit of syntax, welcomes tautology (*I-love-you* means *I-love-you*), rejects the servility of the Sentence" (153). Competing with her verbose sisters Cordelia can answer only with one word.

25. "The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft" (1.1)

And we cannot let the (rain) bow go unnoticed. A deadly weapon, it is, at the same time, an opening which takes us beyond the limitations of the death-dealing order of Realpolitik. As Heraclitus remarked in his 48 fragment, the bow, *bios*, is a strange, unique figure in which life and death are twisted together. "For the bow (*bios*) the name is life (*bios*), but the work is death" (116). In a surprising passage from the final section of his *Tristes tropiques* Claude Lévi-Strauss brings together two extraordinary arches which have always attracted human attention, two phenomena oddly married in the English language: the rainbow and the bow. We will comb this fragment looking for traces of principles upon which a political

action other than that characteristic of Realpolitik of self-interests and ambitions could be conceivable:

> Man is not alone in the universe, any more than the individual is alone in the group, or any one society alone among other societies. Even if the rainbow of human cultures should go down for ever into the abyss which we are so insanely creating, there will still remain open to us provided we are alive and the world is in existence a precarious arch that points towards the inaccessible. (397)

Lévi-Strauss begins by anthropological pessimism which seems to be the first necessary step to make: one has to carefully measure the so called "successes" or "progress" of civilization seeing human history not only as a solid sequence of events but also as intervals, fissures, cracks which, normally ignored, in fact punctuate the texture of history. The sanity of action, step two, must be countered and moderated by the reflection upon the "the abyss which we are so insanely creating." Step three is a sally against the supposed centrality and uniqueness of the human being, the belief which has always energized Realpolitik conducted on behalf of *my /our* interests to the detriment of common weal and interests of others. A new kind of politics, that of *nothing* and of a stand we responsibly take between the bow and arrow, the sword and its victim, must look for its sources in the democracy of being which not only does not exclude other nations/peoples but includes ALL that IS. "Man is not alone in the universe," is a synthetic formulation of such an attitude. The fourth step brings us to a recognition of heterogeneity as a principle virtue which must be rediscovered against forays of nationalisms. Here the first *bow* makes its appearance: Lévi-Strauss speaks about "the rainbow of human cultures" rather than one, homogenous, single-coloured, monochromatic culture energized by what he in another place in his book calls "greed." The fifth step is most important as it directly brings us in the vicinity of Cordelia's *nothing*. A path which can take us away from the cul-de-sac of Realpolitik is not that blazed by Machiavelli but that suggested humbly by Lear's youngest and disinherited daughter. Despite the increasing madness of the sanity of Realpolitik (represented by Goneril, Regan, and in the early stages of the drama by Lear himself) with its duplicitous pitfalls, there is always an opening which rises up and bends in a form of another bow: "a precarious arch that points towards the inaccessible." A beautiful and rich passage which we will not be able to do justice to in this brief attempt. Let us only say quickly that the "inaccessible" in question is what has to remain unnamed, a category beyond all categorization, which translates us outside the "hive-like labors" and as a kind of "grace" allows us to grasp what grounds us in life. As Strauss concludes, "On this opportunity, this chance of for once detaching oneself from the implacable process, life itself depends." This is precisely what constitutes the significance of Cordelia's powerful *nothing* which thwarts all efforts towards translation into a language of *some-thing* (to the blindness

of Lears' famous response: "Nothing will come of nothing," (1.1), we should oppose the insightfulness of "every-thing will come of nothing").

We discover the same energy in the servant's standing up against his master. His claim "I have serv'd you ever since I was child: / But better service have I never done you, / Than now to bid you hold" (3.7). Good human politics can be conducted only standing up against what its institutions and norms expect us to do. If Realpolitik always advocates and proclaims serviceability of subjects, human politics of the gray zone deconstructs this belief: only by radically questioning rigorous serviceability, can we be truly of service to a community.

26. "Give me some help! Oh cruel! Oh you Gods!" (3.7)

Barbara Skarga carefully emphasizes that only my sensitiveness to what goes beyond me, what transcends me, has a power and energy to wake me up from a slumber of a *status quo* in which I feel exempt from any desire to commit myself to anything that is not *me*. Thus, what is awaken is my sense of responsibility all of a sudden spurred by the voice of the other which has somehow chosen me as the addressee of its call (59). This is what happens when the encounter takes place. But we have to remember that the very scene we have borrowed our quotation from is a double encounter. One puts together Gloucester, Regan and Cornwall; the latter two will soon start torturing the old man in the name of their interests. The other encounter cuts through the first: it is the servant intervening between the illegitimate rage of his master and its helpless victim. The intervention also tries to restore the law of hospitality violated by the two culprits. The servant wants to hold the hand of his master, so that no crime would foul the temple of a hospitable refuge. As Gloucester cries out: "You are my guests: do me no foul play, friends" (3.7). A whole series of slippages: first, in the realm of Realpolitik being a guest does not preclude a "foul play." This is a lesson of Machiavelli: who tries to demonstrate that good faith is laudable, but "the experience of our times shows those princes to have done great things who have had little regard for good faith, and have been able by astuteness to confuse men's brains, and who have ultimately overcome those who have made loyalty their foundation" (101). A second slippage: the only source of grace comes from a reversal of roles – a servant will turn out a true friend and host. Only servants, citizens of the second rank, if citizen at all ("slave" is the name given to the servant by Cornwall; "The slave was a thing with a role of a person […]" (Esposito 77). dwellers of the margins and peripheries, those addressed with derogatory animal references (Regan to the servant – "How now, you dog," 3.7). Only from this gray zone whose inhabitants do not hesitate to question the established order not on behalf of their interests but in the name of coming to somebody's rescue, only from there can come the answer to the call "Give me some help."

27. "Hold your hand, my Lord" (3.7)

Here we touch upon a major transgression, if not a scandal which undermines the very foundation of a *status quo* of the state machinery founded upon the principle of the unreflective obedience to his master's voice. Lear formulates this premise in his exchange with Gloucester: "And the creature run from the cur: there thou mightst behold the great image of authority, a dog's obeye'd in office" (4.6). Under no circumstances is a servant permitted to question actions of the master, and the bid to "hold" is particularly duplicitous from the point of view of authority because it opens a space and time for in-activity from which there may emerge an argumentation or litigation demonstrating unlawfulness of the master's voice. The monarch is a sovereign who is always right and always *in* the right, and his voice speaks with the authority of necessity. A sovereign does what is inevitable and necessary. Necessity is the domain of a sovereign, and this necessity is the only source of law. Regan and Cornwall do what is *necessary* in order to secure their political and material interests. As we have seen, they recognize that a "form of justice" would be welcome, but Realpolitik is constantly ready to suggest its own justice, always timely, always on time. Hence the state of exception which "as a figure of necessity […] appears as an 'illegal' but perfectly 'juridical and constitutional' measure that is realized in the production of new norms" (Agamben 2005, 28). A wish to suspend an action is then a desire to suspend a whole system in which law is inevitably founded upon nothing else but some juridical decisions. The servant's intervention demonstrates the vanity of such a position; it points out that law looks for its source in the cry for help that is outside the juridical mechanism as such. In other words, it punctures the myth of necessity as a basis for a political action. Again Lévi-Strauss will assist us in this critique of necessity as a manifestation of grace, the only grace available to a human being. In the same final fragment of *Tristes tropiques* we encounter the following apology of a "hold" or "halt":

> The grace to call a halt, that is to say: to check the impulse which prompts Man always to block up, one after another, such fissures as may be open in the blank wall of necessity and to round off his achievement by slamming shut the doors of his own prison. This is the grace for which every society longs, irrespective of its beliefs, its political regime, its level of civilization. It stands, in every case, for leisure, and recreation, and freedom, and peace of body and mind. (397)

What we need for politics that would be *human* (but not "all-too-human") is an opening, a fissure in the shell of necessity which constitutes our own imprisonment. The anthropologist's point is clear: a community is founded upon a yearning for such cracks which Realpolitik concentrates on sealing. If there is one condition under which the final decree of Albany "friends of my soul, you twain, / Rule in

this Realm, and the gor'd state sustain" (5.3) makes sense, it is this: the state will not heal its wounds unless a crack in the necessity of Realpolitik is discovered and widened. The opening through which we will be able to follow the arch towards the inaccessible.

28. "Ha? here's three on's are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself […]" (3.4)

When we speak about animality and exposure the theme of nakedness cannot be far away. "Is man no more than this?" – Lear's question come as a response to a long speech in which Edgar tries to address the issue of his past identity. Lear's "What hast thou been?" is met with a list of courtly activities largely preoccupied with carnal pleasures with a conclusion organized along two lines. One groups transgressive behaviour under the auspices of body parts: "False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand." The other, subsumes negative features under the rubric of particular animals: "hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey" (3.4). Man disfigures the body through his or her actions, distorts and deviates from the originary use of organs falsifying them or putting them to a wrong and evil use. This is a lesson of the first grouping. The other demonstrates the misuse of the animal which functions as a reflection of a specific type of human (mis)behaviour. Not the animal matters but a human being which projects upon it his/ her vice. The humanization of the animal which is locked in a kind of negative relation serving as a reference and embodiment of human vice. Such a humanization is, in fact, a vilification.

Hence, the necessity of nakedness. Dispensing with clothing (Edgar is almost naked, Lear commands "unbutton here") is synonymous with dropping all screens and masks, "the rustling of silks," and, to quote Edmund again, "the plague of custom." Lear's *sophisticated* belongs to the same series amplified by a hint at mechanisms of adjustment which regulate human (mis)behaviour. To be naked means to be *unaccommodated*, that is move away from the organization of life previously holding its iron rule over us towards a marginal, peripheral zone with uncertain rules where *our* decision, and not the dictate of "the custom," is mandatory. To use Shakespeare's discourse: to shift from the thing disguised and veiled by tactics of accommodation to "the thing itself." The stripping involved here also sheds the previously mentioned mechanisms of the humanization / vilification of animals: "Thou ow'st the worm no silk; the beast, no hide; the sheep, no wool; the cat, no perfume. Ha? […] Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man, is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (3.4). A naked man recognizes his heavy indebtedness to the animal, but, at the same time, admits that the credit has been put to wrong uses: instead of showing man for what he/ she is, it was turned against man and consumed for the intricate machinery of deception (such as fashion, for instance).

29. "[…] never, never, never, never, never" (5.3)

At the end of the play we seem to come back to where we started: distribution of political and administrative power. It is Albany now who is in a position of Lear carving out portions of land and ministering rights. Death has to give way to the demands of the political scene. When Messenger brings in the news about Edmund's death Albany responds briefly: "That's but a trifle here […]." No moral evaluations are attempted here; what we deal with is rather a confirmation of the basic principle of political theology – a division of the world into friends and enemies: "All friends shall taste / The wages of their virtue, and all foes / The cup of their deservings […]" (5.3). Dying Lear cuts this with his five-time repeated *never* which is an equivalent of Cordelia's *nothing* from the first act. The excessive and always recurring pretences of politics and its pompous discourses can be parried by a nearly inarticulate, repetitive word, a sound, an ejaculation, an outcry, which compromises the hollow semantics of powers.

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